

Spring 2019

## Perspectives on Malaga Island: From Scorn to Shame to Sympathy

Darcie Drew  
*University of Southern Maine*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking\\_matters](https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters)

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Drew, Darcie, "Perspectives on Malaga Island: From Scorn to Shame to Sympathy" (2019). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 215.  
[https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking\\_matters/215](https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters/215)

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu](mailto:jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu).



# Abstract

Local and national perspectives of Malaga Island have changed substantially from the time of settlement to today. I researched these perspectives in order to create a week-long unit for a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies class here in Portland.

# Background

Malaga Island off the Maine coast was a home to a small interracial fishing community from 1860 to 1912, at which point the State of Maine evicted the residents. Several islanders were subsequently institutionalized at Pineland School for the Feeble-minded; the rest were left to rebuild their lives elsewhere. Governor LePage apologized for the actions of state officials 100 years later, in 2012.



Figure 1. Residents of Malaga in front of their home

## Primary Sources

My investigation included various primary sources: photographs of the original settlement, newspaper articles from around the country about the community and its dissolution (1900s and today), documentary video and audio, non-fiction texts about Malaga and Pineland, contemporary art and song on the subject, archeological objects from Malaga, and fictional texts about the story of the island. Most resources were compiled for students to then access, some were for my edification so that I could answer student questions.

# Lesson Series

I then built workshop style lesson plans, so students would have a chance to interact directly with the primary sources and their differing viewpoints.

- Day 1: Life in the 1900s & The Eugenics Movement
- Day 2: The Story of Malaga
- Day 3: Yellow Journalism
- Day 4: Historic Perspectives
- Day 5: Modern Perceptions
- Days 6-10: Project Workshop

# Memorial Project

The unit culminated in an authentic project wherein students created their own memorials to the people of Malaga Island. These memorials were shared with school visitors in December.

- In groups of their own choosing, students created a visual memorial and a plaque for said visual.
- Independently, students wrote a justification for why their memorial is the way that Maine should remember the people of Malaga Island.
- Students were required to submit evidence of drafting for both their visual and their writing along with their final products.
- Students were assessed on their written communication, visual communication, and knowledge of history.

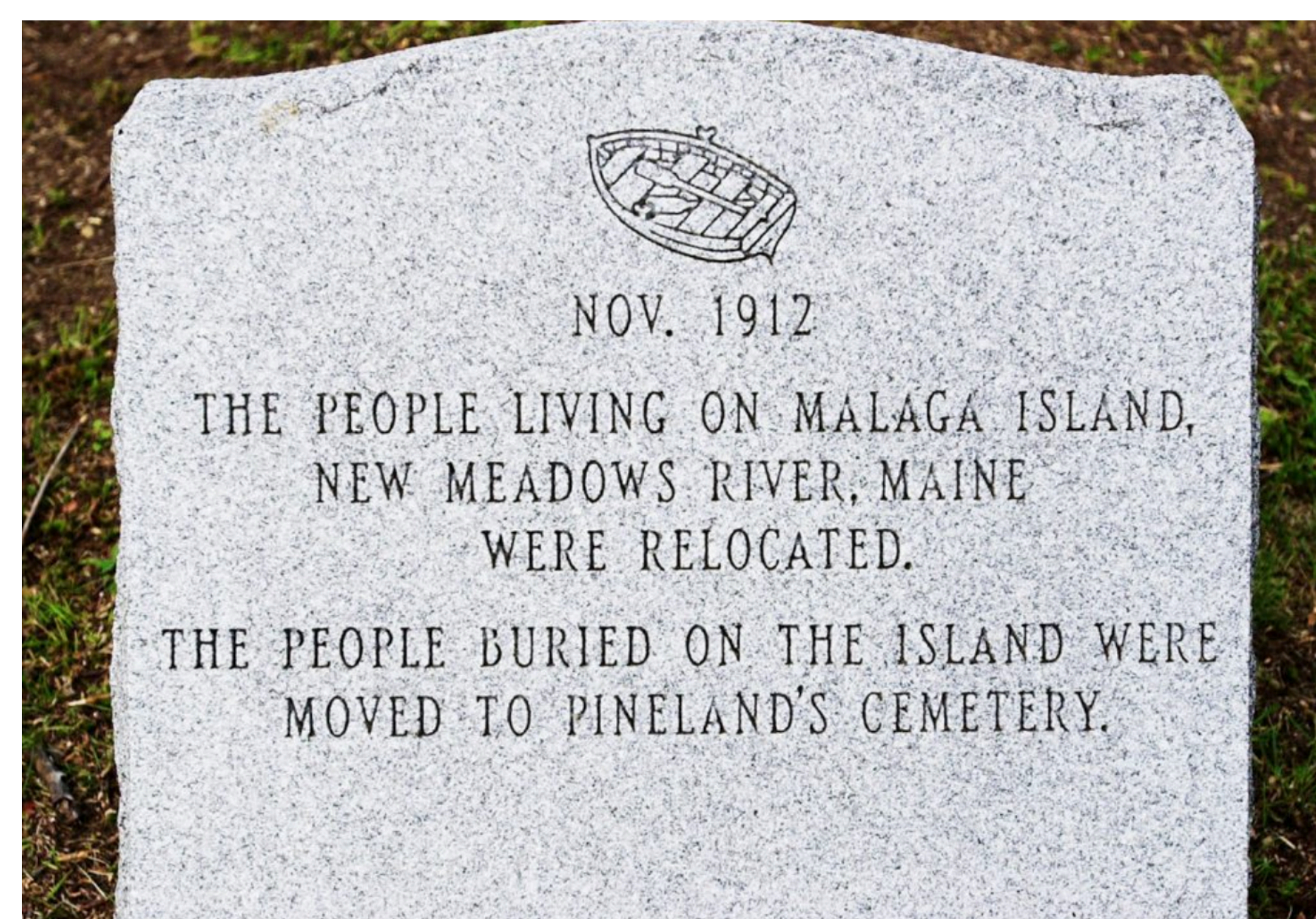


Figure 2. Original Malaga Island Memorial

## Conclusions

The unit served a multitude of educational purposes. Students learned about their local history, how to analyze primary sources, how important it is to consider multiple perspectives before forming an opinion, and how to contribute to a community conversation about history.



Once upon a time, where the island met the Atlantic sea  
There was peaceful humans, living side by side in society  
But mainlanders only saw monsters, which disrupted the island's harmony

Ooooooh Malaga island  
The settling land of Benjamin darling  
Oooooooh Malaga island  
Asylums were filling, and blood was spilling  
Oooooooh Malaga island  
A time to remember, a cold day in December

In 1912, time wasn't a changing  
Malaga's race and gender was kinda phasing  
There was yellow journalism Malaga was facing harsh criticism

Figures 3, 4 & 5. Memorials created by 7th grade students

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Julie Shepherd for her mentorship and for letting me take over her 7<sup>th</sup> grade class for several weeks. And to Roland Houghton for following these lessons and helping his 7<sup>th</sup> graders create their projects. Thanks to Adam Schmitt for the suggestion that students create their own memorials. My gratitude to my classmates for helping me incubate and talk through these lessons. Finally, a thank you to Bernard Drew for locating many of the newspaper articles, and to Donna Drew for her advice on teaching art in middle school.

## References

- Murphy, S. T. (2011). *Voices of Pineland*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Pub.
- Philbrick, K., & Rosenthal, R. (2009). Malaga Island: a story best left untold. Retrieved from <http://www.malagaislandmaine.org/index.htm>
- Torrow, J., & McBrien K. (2012). Learn about Malaga Island. Retrieved from Maine State Museum website: <https://mainestatemuseum.org/learn/malaga-island-fragmented-lives-educational-materials/> learn-malaga-island/